

[EDITORS and
REPORTERS: Here is
the complete text of
the statement given
by Gloria Tristani,
Manager Director of
the Office of
Communication of the
United Church of
Christ, Inc., Oct.
13, 2004.]

"'It is the purpose
of the First
Amendment to
preserve an
uninhibited
marketplace of ideas
in which truth will
ultimately prevail,
rather than to
countenance
monopolization of
that market, whether
it be by the
Government
itself or a private
licensee.' -- Red
Lion Broadcasting v.
FCC, 395 US 367
(1969)

"Sinclair
Broadcasting's plans
to show an
Anti-Kerry
documentary days
before the
presidential
election demands
restoring the
personal attack rule
and the Fairness
Doctrine.

"The Fairness
Doctrine was a
Federal
Communications
Commission (FCC)
policy
from 1949 to 1987
that required that
television
broadcasters, as a
condition of getting
their licenses from
the government,
cover
controversial issues
in their community,
and do so by
offering balancing
and contrasting

views. The personal attack rule, which was in force from 1967 to 2000, gave individuals an opportunity to respond to an attack on their character during the discussion of controversial public issues.

"While Sinclair can order its 62 television stations to air the documentary, each station holds its license as a public trustee and is obligated to serve its community of license. A fundamental public interest obligation is to ensure that the discussion of public affairs on the public airwaves remains a marketplace of ideas and not a platform for attacks on personal character. Serving the public interest also entails airing contrasting and balancing viewpoints on issues of public concern.

"While these fundamental public interest obligations are embodied in the Communications Act and in seminal Supreme Court cases, nothing in the present Federal Communication Commission rules or policy would explicitly require Sinclair, if it airs the documentary in question, to give others the air time to provide a

contrasting or
balancing view, or
to give Senator
Kerry equal time to
respond.

"The Office of
Communication of the
United Church of
Christ has advocated
for the public
interest in
broadcasting since
the 1960s when it
challenged
the license of a
television station
for its failure to
cover or discuss
civil right issues,
based in part on the
Fairness doctrine.
Today, we are
increasingly
concerned about the
dangers that media
consolidation poses
to
our democracy and
self-governance.

"It is high time
that the FCC, or
even better, the
United States
Congress,
reinstate the
personal attack rule
and the Fairness
Doctrine."